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Illustrating Life

Documents submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University

By

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Table of Contents

Artist Statement: <i>Illustrating Life</i>	iii
Introduction: Background.....	1
The Evolving Process.....	2
Drawing: Portraiture.....	3
Abstract Painting.....	4
Symbolism.....	6
Conclusion.....	8
Future Plans.....	9
Bibliography.....	10
Appendix.....	11
Resume.....	17

Artist's Statement: Illustrating Life

My paintings contain both abstract and figurative elements that share an underlying theme: spiritual symbolism that conveys positive principles to live by. The symbolism that underscores my content carries over to my choice of palette; for example, red or yellow implies the vitality of life while purple stands for royalty.

With my drawings, I concentrate on highly realistic graphite portraits of individuals I know. I present them in the environments in which they live to help highlight their unique personalities. With both painting and drawing, my goal is to illustrate spiritual philosophies on macro and micro levels respectively.

Introduction

All of my life, drawing has been my choice of artistic expression. I have always enjoyed its multifaceted nature to create a variety of subject matter. In addition to providing a memorable aesthetic experience for viewers, my greatest desire is to create works of art that emphasize the expressive physical and spiritual qualities in my portraits along with an emphatic sense of mood in my abstract work.

Although I have been drawing for years, it wasn't until I had a life changing event in 1987 that this aspect of my life began to have a true purpose. After being healed by God for depression, I began to use portraiture to express the state of my inner spirit. Most of my work at this time was composed of detailed blending and shading of my subject matter. Because I had suffered mentally for many years, I wanted people to understand my experience with depression. In the spring of 1988, I won the Prince Georges Community College Juried Art Exhibition with a portrait of my mom. Thus, I began my journey with an artistic focus that needed to be developed.

Section I: An Evolving Process

When I entered the VCU/MIS graduate art program, the purpose I had in mind was to improve the technical aspect of my work. I initially thought that it was the only area that needed to be developed. However, I noticed through critiques that there was much more missing. My work lacked adequate composition, style, and dramatic themes. I didn't have a full understanding of how to use line to stimulate the illusion of movement and action.

During my first semester, I quickly realized that in order to improve my compositions, I needed to learn how to capture a strong palpable sense of space. I also lacked the ability to clearly communicate my message in my work. There was no intriguing interaction with my content nor a style that presented something new to the eye. With this in mind, I completed a self-portrait called "Isaiah 41:10" (Appendix, Figure 1). In this work, one can see the interaction between the Lord and myself in an intimate way through the arrangement of symbols associated with this subject matter. My intent was to present an image of protection, fellowship, and God's supernatural involvement and love in my life. I consider this work a new direction for my artwork. It provided a perfect example of how I could use all the elements and principles of art together to form a consistent body of work.

Everything about the composition, including color and perspective, is to symbolic. It was at this time that I realized I needed a stronger foundation of art skills in order to follow a new direction in my work. This was my purpose after entering the MIS program at VCU.

Section II: Drawing -Portraiture

Although I have always had an interest in human anatomy as artistic content, my interest goes further with a goal to reflect mood and feelings in my work. I have had the opportunity from my prior education to learn how to capture the essential appearance of an object at close study and enjoy the challenge of doing so. I understand how light and shade can be implemented to create tonal balance.

An example of this can be seen in the “Shadow of the Almighty” (Appendix, Figure 2) which I created in a drawing class taught by Kurt Godwin. In this piece, I used a deep shadow juxtaposed with a sphere of light for extreme contrast. My intention was done to show the presence of something or someone that I suggest is the Almighty. The person’s face in this portrait is meant to say that there is a Majestic Presence which is the refuge for the individual. My instructor suggested that I emphasize contrast more to bring out more depth.

In my second drawing class, I learned to incorporate expressions and moods in my portraiture. I discovered how to render facial features to realistically express emotions such as shyness, concern, joy, and sadness. An example of this is the portrait titled “Faithful Grandma”(Appendix, Figure 3) a portrait of my Great Grandmother, Beatrice Thomas. The purpose of this portrait was to capture the regal stature of her being by using dark and light values in order to create depth and weight, reinforcing a feeling of solidity. This work is intended as a tribute to a loving grandmother. Again, I placed the subject in familiar surrounding to emphasize her individuality. In this case, Beatrice was known to relax in her chair on the front porch.

III. Abstract Painting

After entering the MIS program, I discovered a new love and deeper understanding for visual abstraction as an expressive language. It began with an intense study in my second drawing course entitled “Pen, Ink and Beyond.” The class combined Drawing and Painting, allowing me to look at expression in a new way as I learned how to render mood, feelings and action in my artwork. I believe this has allowed me to convey clear, complex and sophisticated concepts to my viewers. When I started these

classes, I was dealing with a couple of problems: an over-reliance on realism and a lack of previous experience with the pen and ink. My first challenge was to overcome these problems.

Through exploration and experimentation, I discovered and learned a new visual language. I began studying geometric forms and shapes and the inherent ideas and principles behind them. I also began to discard all realistic assumptions and habits in my approach and focus on a more conceptual approach to convey emotions. An example of this is entitled “The Life and Times of Christ”(Appendix, Figure 4). In this piece I was trying to portray a vision of struggle, steadfastness, triumph, and victory. This work began with pouring puddles of water on the paper and working into it with pen and ink effects such as cross hatching and stippling once the water has dried. This approach allowed me to formulate my ideas through an evolving process without relying on my realistic tendencies.

Having had the opportunity to experiment with the use of materials and techniques, I can now focus more on adding literal depth in my artwork. By adding touches of realism, I limit the scope of interpretation into the meaning of my work.

IV. Symbolism

A surprising development in my work is the use of symbolic content.

I never had used symbols at all in my work for three reasons: first, I hadn't done any research for their use artistically. Second, I had a hard time making a connection between the use of symbols and my abstract work and third, I just didn't feel confident because of my lack of knowledge.

All of this changed while I was taking drawing and printmaking taught by Kurt Godwin and Warren Carrado respectively. During my first printmaking class, I had the chance to experiment with spiritual symbolism such as the cross, the ark of the covenant, and the blood of Christ to illustrate my spiritual philosophy. I was instructed by Mr. Godwin to research my areas of interest and to investigate any associated symbolism. Another suggestion involved how to fuse them into my abstract work. So, the experiment began. I studied works by artists such as George Rouault whose painting entitled "Crucifixion" is inspiring. This work of art clearly demonstrates the effective use of faith based symbology. Taking symbols and surrounding them with a dramatic setting is what I wanted to learn to incorporate in my work. After studying the Bible, I started to take note of important symbols such as the cross, the ark of the covenant, the communion table and its items of bread and wine. I then began placing these symbols in my

abstract work according to their importance in the Christian faith. An example is my painting and intaglio print entitled “The Holy Communion Altar” (Appendix, Figure 5). In these works of art, I used realistic images of bread and wine and placed them upon an abstracted altar. This altar comes toward viewers to get their attention. Its shape and position is realistic. The cross that stands in the corner signifies the importance of this sacrament. The bread and wine represent the body and blood of Christ who died on the cross for man’s sins. Thus began my incorporation of symbolism that continues to evolve with my work.

Conclusion

As I conclude my experience in the MIS program, I can now say that I have a solid foundation in my profession as both an art teacher and artist. I have had the chance to develop my composition, tonality, and dramatic themes in my work as an artist. As an art teacher, I have learned a great deal and have been able to gain experience in using art materials and a variety of procedures. The many resources that I have been given by my instructors have added depth to my own curriculum and lesson planning as a teacher. I feel extremely comfortable in teaching a variety of artistic subject

matters without any insecurity. I can teach all grade levels knowing exactly what to do, what materials to use, and what must be addressed.

The training that I received as an artist in the MIS program has taken my work to a higher level of development. This is exactly what I wanted as I entered the program. I also learned how to incorporate my spiritual philosophy in my work in a more arresting, theatrical way. Through critiques and classroom discussions, my instructors have given me the feedback and reinforcement that I need to grasp specific concepts. The experience allowed me to develop my style as an artist.

Future Plans

My next objective is to use this experience to enhance the quality and content of the work in my art company. I have been blessed by God to oversee a brand new art company called All For Jesus Scripture Fine Art. I plan to use the knowledge I received in techniques, procedures and materials to add quality to our art instruction department. I also plan to provide all my artists with the resources that I received and to share with them the method of using spiritual symbolism in their work. I am also planning future

exhibitions with my company that will incorporate various aspects of my experience in the MIS program.

Bibliography

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Appendix

1. *Isaiah 41:10*, 18"x 24", pencil on paper, 2004.
2. *In The Shadow of the Almighty*, 18"x 24", pencil on paper, 2004.
3. *Faithful Grandma*, 18"x 24", pencil on paper, 2003.
4. *The Life and Times of Christ*, 18"x 24", pen and ink on paper, 2005.
5. *The Holy Communion Altar*, 36"x 48", acrylic on canvas, 2004.

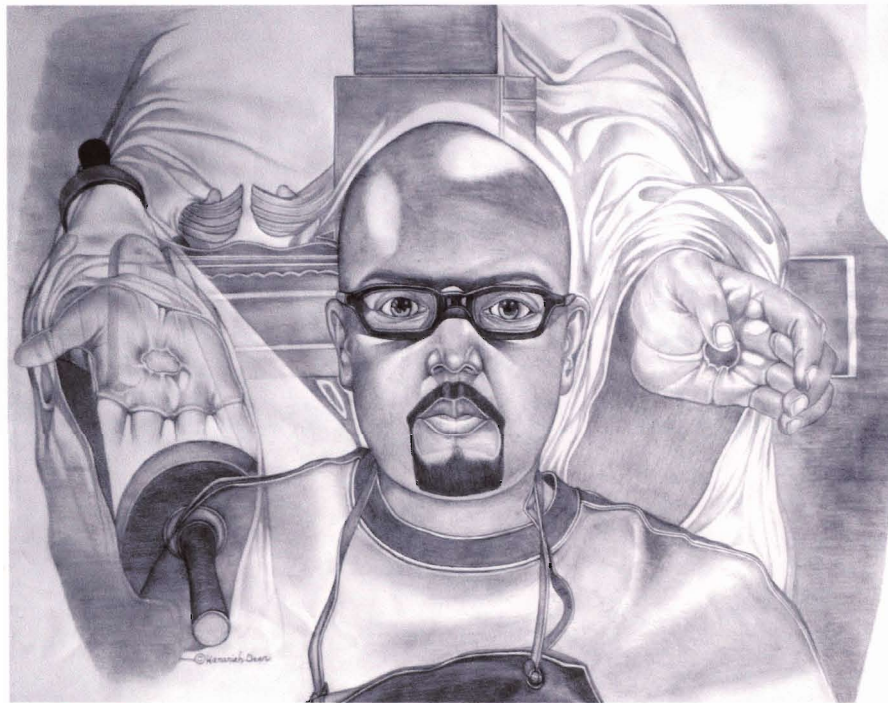


Figure 1. *Isaiah 41:10*, pencil on paper, 18"x 24", 2004.

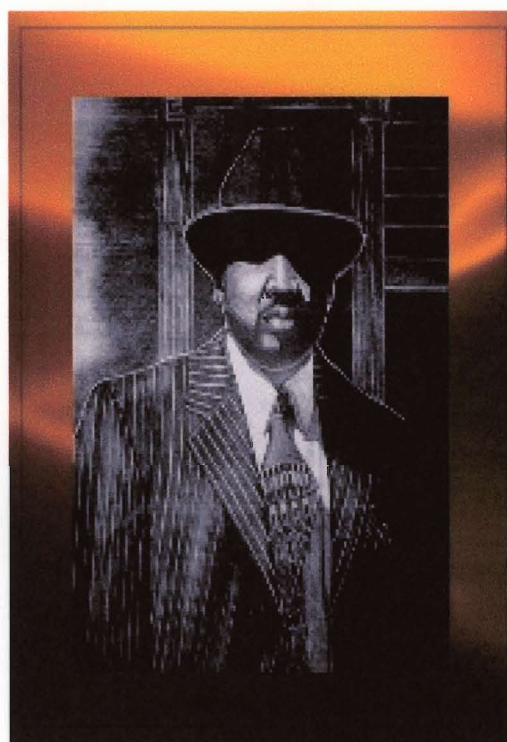


Figure 2. *In The Shadow of The Almighty*, pencil on paper, 18"x 24", 2004.

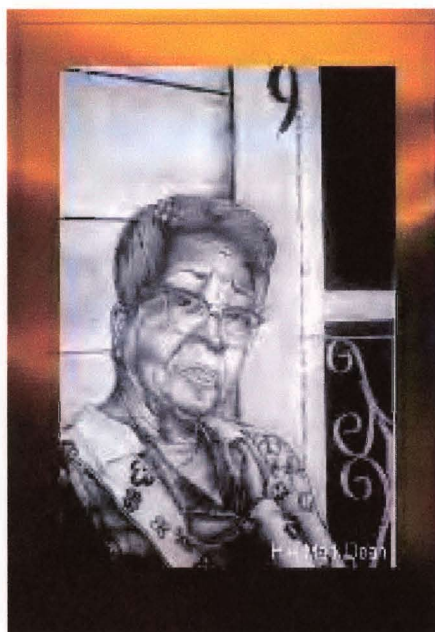


Figure 3. *Faithful Grandma*, pencil on paper, 18"x 24", 2003.

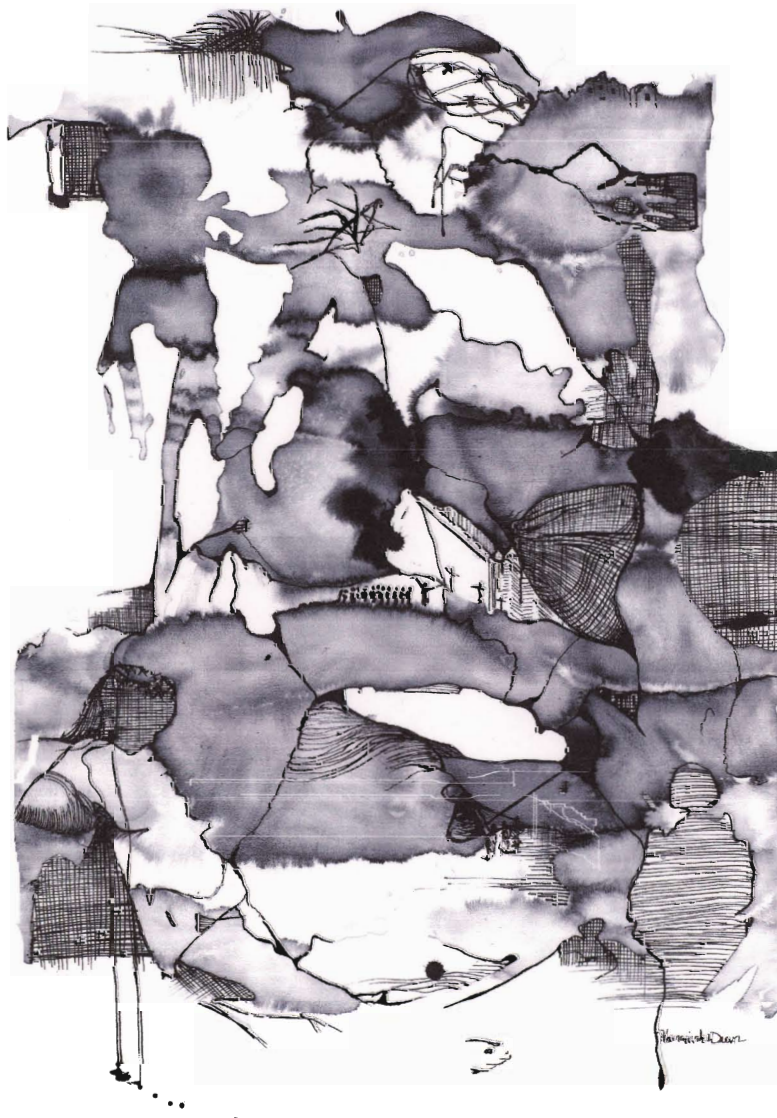


Figure 4. *The Life and Times of Christ*, pen and ink on paper, 18"x 24", 2005.



The Holy Communion Altar
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Figure 5. *The Holy Communion Altar*, acrylic on canvas, 36"x 48", 2004.

Dr. H.A.Mark Dean

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Education

- 2006 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies Art Degree, Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, VA
- 2005 Doctorate of Ministry Degree, Faith Christian University, Temple Hills, MD
- 2003 Master of Art in Christian Education, Faith Christian University, Temple Hills, MD
- 1992 Bachelors of Fine Art Degree in Art Studio, University of Texas, Arlington, TX
- Certification: Maryland State Advance Professional Teaching Certificate

Employment

- 2005-Pr Associate Dean, Faith Home and International Missions, Temple Hills, MD
- 2003-Pr Founder/Owner, All For Jesus Scripture Art, Waldorf, MD
- 1994-Pr Visual Arts Teacher, Stephen Decatur Middle School, Clinton, MD

Memberships

- Present - Strathsmore Hall Arts Center, Rockville, MD
- Present - Maryland Arts Place, Baltimore, MD
- Present - Prince Georges County Arts Alliance, Hyattsville, MD
- Present - Charles County Arts Alliance, La Plata, MD

Exhibitions

- 2006 - Masters of Interdisciplinary Studies Thesis Exhibition, Key Gallery
Fort Washington, MD
- 2005 - Regional Artists Exhibition, Visions Gallery, Washington D.C
- 2005 - Love Exhibition, Strathsmore Hall Arts Center, Rockville, MD
- 2005 - Prince Georges County Art Teachers Exhibit, Montpelier Cultural Arts Center
Laurel, MD

Recognition and Awards

- 2006 - Inducted into the National Honor Rolls "Outstanding American Teachers"
- 2005 - Christian Service Award Recipient, Faith Christian University
- 2005 - CTV(Cable Network) I was featured on their arts and entertainment segment.
- 2005 - Prince Georges Gazette Newspaper, Fine Arts Section pp.25- This was an article covering my life as an artist with a dual role as a Art Teacher in Prince Georges County.
- 2005 - Prince Georges Gazette Newspaper, Positive Impacts pp.4- I was featured in the Life-Style section with a article showing how my art program was affecting the lives of people in Prince Georges County.
- 1995 - Creative Arts Teacher Award for 1995-2003- I was given this award for outstanding achievement in Stephen Decatur Art Department.
- 1988 - First Place in Drawing, Prince Georges Community College
- 1987 - Benjamin T. Tanner Scholarship Recipient, Ebenezer AME Church